



# NEWS

---

**From the Illinois Senate**

***State Senator Dave Koehler***

**For immediate release**

August 10, 2009

**Further information:**

Ian Watts 217/782-0591

## **New State Program Combats Childhood Obesity**

PEORIA, IL—Late Friday, the governor signed into law the Farm Fresh Schools Program, which will fight childhood obesity and encourage the consumption of local produce.

“Obesity is an epidemic in this country, and research shows that obese children are more likely to become obese adults,” said State Sen. Dave Koehler (D-Peoria), the legislation’s sponsor. “We need to try new and creative ways to encourage children to make good health choices.”

The Farm Fresh Schools Program, created by House Bill 78, will link schools with local and regional farms. The farms will provide minimally processed fruits and vegetables that can be used in school meals, snacks, salad bars, and vending machines. In addition, schools will teach about the importance of nutrition and gardening. The schools may also be able to use funding from the program for related projects, like farm visits, school gardens, and cooking demonstrations.

The program will be jointly administered by the State Board of Education and the Illinois Department of Agriculture. To qualify, Illinois schools will prepare grant proposals to be reviewed by the overseeing agencies. In order to ensure that the program has a diverse geographical impact, the first six grants will be awarded in six different counties. Three counties will be urban, and the other three will be rural—with a significant agricultural economy.

“Eating fresh fruits and vegetables, combined with exercise, is one of the best ways to maintain a healthy weight,” Koehler said. “Using locally grown fruits and vegetables is good for Illinois’ economy and protects the environment by lowering transportation-based pollution. Everyone wins under this program.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control, childhood obesity rates increased from 6.5% to 17% among 6-to-11 year-olds and from 5% to 17.6% among 12-to-19 year-olds between 1980 and 2006. Obese children are more likely to suffer from Cardiovascular Disease, Asthma, Type 2 Diabetes, and other illnesses.

###